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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to help school personnel and community members who are interested in violence prevention in schools. It discusses the starting point for prevention and claims that the same basic framework can be used to develop effective plans in elementary schools and secondary schools. The paper advocates a comprehensive approach to school safety. Administrative support is essential, as are careful planning, schoolwide education and training, and counseling and social services. It outlines violence-prevention frameworks and administrative approaches. It underscores the importance of accurate monitoring and of training teachers in classroom discipline. The report also presents a framework for school security. Effective security programs use schoolwide education in violence prevention, make student counseling available, and have a clear plan in place for students in alternative education. Key elements to any program are community and parental involvement. Students need to know that parents support the school discipline policies, including any reasonable punishment administered by the school. Schools also need to work with police and juvenile-justice authorities, with the business community, and with community organizations. When choosing a violence-prevention program, schools should identify and measure the problem, set goals and objectives, select appropriate strategies, implement a comprehensive plan, and evaluate the program. (RJM)

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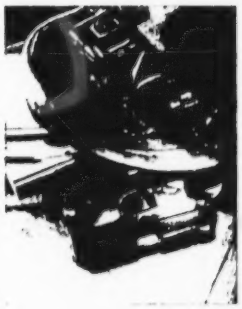
A Comprehensive Framework for School Violence Prevention



Overview

The Comprehensive Framework for School Violence Prevention is a guide designed to assist school personnel and community members interested in violence prevention in the difficult task of providing a safe learning environment. The framework covers both what needs to be done and how to proceed.

Where Do We Start with Prevention?

Whether a school is working with elementary school-aged children or teenagers, the same basic framework can be used to develop an effective violence prevention plan. The key is for the plan to be comprehensive—to include every aspect of the school as well as the surrounding community. Even within a single individual, violent behavior is the result of many different influences, both internal and external. Violence prevention calls for a multifaceted, yet well-integrated, plan that addresses a broad range of causal factors.

Although a child or teenager is not beyond help at any developmental stage, prevention is most effective when it begins early and is continuously reinforced. Violence is most common in middle and high schools, but aggressive and violent behavior often begins very early in life. As middle and high school personnel anxiously seek interventions to meet adolescents' immediate needs, juvenile justice authorities struggle with the large number of incarcerated violent juveniles and seek ways to rehabilitate them. Prevention should start in the home at a very early age and continue throughout the elementary and secondary grades.

A Comprehensive Approach

A comprehensive approach to school safety involves meeting several challenges at the same time. Administrative support is essential to laying a solid foundation for violence prevention efforts. Careful planning and vigilant monitoring are required to ensure the security of the school facility. School-wide education and training about safety prepare students to take careful action to avoid becoming either perpetrators or victims of violence. Counseling and social services help students and their families deal with the difficult situations they face that could lead to violence and provide them with appropriate resources to cope with the aftermath of violence. Violent students must be treated appropriately to direct them toward more positive behavior and to ensure the safety of other students and staff. Involvement of parents and other concerned community members provides essential resources and support. When appropriate measures are taken in all these areas, the risk of violence at school is minimized.

Violence Prevention Frameworks

- Administrative Approaches
- School Security

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- School-wide Education
- Student Counseling
- Alternative Education
- Community Involvement

Administrative Approaches

Generally, schools exert a very positive influence on students, although it is possible for schools to exert positive, neutral, and negative influences on students simultaneously. The negative influences are almost always unintended, and very often school personnel are either unaware of them or feel unable to eliminate them.

Conducting a careful study of the ways schools could be creating situations that cause stress and lead to violence is an important first step in reducing violence. Issues to address include the treatment of all students in a respectful, even, and fair manner; elimination of overcrowding; reduction of unfruitful competition among students; provision of outlets for personal expression; and use of due process.

Environmental interventions, such as school security strategies and broader changes in the school climate, may be implemented before educational interventions to improve the chances for success. The school can begin enhancing safety before asking students to participate. Students may respect this "inward" look by school personnel, and some may respond with a greater willingness to examine their own behaviors.
A Framework for Administrative Approaches

Principals who are effective, visible leaders and who treat teachers, other staff, and students with dignity and respect create an environment conducive to learning, school attachment, and nonviolent behavior. Superintendents and principals who are innovative, provide adequate resources, and are actively involved in all aspects of violence prevention increase the likelihood of success.

Providing engaging and effective academic programs that recognize multiple forms of student achievement and providing opportunities for recreation and self-expression captivate the natural curiosity of students and channel their energy into constructive learning activities. High quality professional development opportunities should be available to teachers who want to learn new ways to actively engage students in the learning process.

Ensuring that there is a hierarchy of consequences for inappropriate behaviors may increase students' respect for authority. The system must match consequences to the severity of infractions, enforce the disciplinary code consistently and impartially, follow due process in dealing with suspects (by using witnesses, gathering evidence, involving multiple staff members in deciding how to react), and reinforce positive behavior with an emphasis equal to that placed on sanctioning negative behavior. Authority figures will be more respected if they reward more than they punish.

Effective communication of the school disciplinary code to both students and parents at the beginning of the school year, and again with each infraction, helps students learn the boundaries of appropriate behavior and teaches them to observe those boundaries. Good communication between school personnel and both parents and students at all levels increases the likelihood that

needs will be recognized and met early. In addition, fear of violence among the general student body will be reduced and appropriate sanctions for violent behavior will be present.

Accurate monitoring and prompt reporting of serious violent behaviors to the police and the parents of both the perpetrators and victims acts as a deterrent to repeated offenses and sends a clear message that violent behavior is illegal behavior that will not be tolerated on school grounds. Tracking offenses by students, both in the school and in the community, provides essential information for planning appropriate remedies.

Training teachers in classroom discipline, handling disruptive and violent students, and treating all students with respect, thus avoiding embarrassment or humiliation, decreases the likelihood of school violence. Administrators could also consider tracking how many discipline referrals come from each teacher to determine if any need extra support in the classroom. Teachers can be trained to serve as models of nonviolent communication for students and to set the standards for appropriate classroom communication and behavior. Decreasing the number of students assigned to each teacher increases the likelihood that the training will have the desired result. For example, dividing large schools into smaller functional units is possible in many schools without additional funding.

School Security

In the 1997–1998 school year, several high profile cases of school shootings led schools and communities to consider alternatives for increasing the security of students and staff while on campus. Because youth are required to attend school, officials incur the legal responsibility to provide a safe environment.

Schools are increasingly held liable in civil cases when they fail to provide reasonable and prudent security to students. Having learned that no school is immune to serious and sudden violence, administrators are choosing to adopt new technologies and strengthen existing security strategies. Many of these approaches are expensive in start-up costs, external expertise, and maintenance and are more effective when updated periodically, yet for some schools the investment appears warranted. Collectively, these security approaches can reduce violence—without necessarily altering the attitudes or competencies of students—merely by channeling their behaviors into desired forms and eliminating opportunities for violent behavior.

A Framework for School Security

Monitoring all areas of the school building and grounds increases the risk of detection for violent offenders and increases their fear of being caught. Monitoring can be improved by ensuring that entries and administrative offices are visible from the street; exterior lights are break resistant; areas where students congregate are limited and supervised; playground equipment is located where school staff, neighbors, and police patrols have good visual surveillance; blind spots are limited by the use of low-level landscaping; the facility and grounds have sufficient lighting; and other methods. Volunteer patrols by students and parents can greatly increase monitoring as well as give students extra opportunities to hold leadership positions and learn responsibility. Students of all disciplinary histories should be encouraged to participate.

Spaces in and near the school that are difficult to monitor can be redesigned to eliminate places

where violence is more likely to occur. Beneficial features of a school facility include limiting roof and window access, closing off areas under stairs, and eliminating drop tile ceilings where weapons can be hidden.

Restricting access to the building prevents inappropriate individuals, such as expelled students, students from other schools, and others, from entering and makes it more difficult for students to bring weapons into the school. Methods to restrict access include enforcing a policy against loitering on campus by non-students, requiring identification cards of all students and staff entering the building, limiting handles on exterior doors with the exception of major entry doors and places where fire fighters must be able to enter, and requiring that visitors sign in and be escorted.

Assigning an appropriate level of responsibility to every person in the school for maintaining a secure environment increases the likelihood that evidence of violence and the presence of weapons will be reported and that staff and students will be prepared to respond appropriately to incidents of violence. For example, students should be urged not to conceal violent disciplinary infractions or threats of violence by other students and to report the presence of weapons at school. Staff should be urged to report all violent incidents.

Effective use of security personnel, security devices, and police provides an added measure of safety. Metal detectors are expensive, slow the entry of students, and are not entirely effective, yet they can be used randomly (without advance warning) to limit the presence of weapons at school. Alarm systems and surveillance cameras draw attention to unauthorized entries. Police patrols increase the risk of being arrested for violent behavior and for carrying concealed weapons.

A number of systems are needed to prepare adequately for a violent crisis. These include providing communication devices to staff so they can alert administrators or security personnel of problems, back-up power and communications systems, a bull-horn for communicating with large groups of people, a telephone recording system to record bomb or other threats, a crisis response team with clearly delineated duties, a rapid parent notification system, and a single point of contact with the media.

Keeping the school facility clean, in good repair and attractive to students increases respect for the school and school officials among students and can decrease vandalism and violent behavior. Immediately painting over graffiti (after taking photographs for investigators)

School-wide Education in Violence Prevention

Education and skills training can be offered to improve attitudes and competencies as a means of reducing violent behaviors or increasing behaviors that protect students from violence. Interventions of this type may influence the student through enhancing personal and social competencies and by reducing aggressive actions in response to anger.

Students need age-appropriate interventions regularly throughout the school years to ensure that they grasp the concepts, can translate knowledge and skills to behavior change, and can resist pressures to engage in violent behavior. Behavioral change does not occur quickly and requires sustained intervention over time. Many of the influences of popular culture support violent behavior, and instruction alone is not necessarily adequate to counter these forces. As part of the educational process, students need to practice building social skills and resisting negative pressures from peers and community members.

A Framework for School-wide Education

Most students can benefit from basic education and training in social skills, anger management, nonviolent communication, danger avoidance, conflict resolution, and appropriate use of mediation, police, and legal services. Introducing this training early and reinforcing it throughout the school years will maximize its effects.

Age-appropriate learning materials can be either integrated into standard curricula, such as teaching conflict resolution during a history course, or presented as stand-alone violence-prevention classes.

Banners, posters, skits, special events, and other creative attention-grabbing and awareness-raising activities can supplement violence-prevention curricula.

The effectiveness of educational strategies for avoiding violence is enhanced when school administrators provide services to support students, including added personal security in response to specific risks of student victimization, anonymous "tip" programs to assist in gathering evidence of violence or weapons, and referral of victims to legal and medical services.

Interventions that rely on a variety of interactive learning opportunities, such as role playing and small group exercises, rather than didactic teaching, are more likely to be effective. Similarly, interventions that teach and give students opportunities to practice skills are more likely to be effective than interventions that merely present information.

Student Counseling

Students bring their emotional needs to school with them. Increasingly, schools are responding by offering limited counseling services. Expansion of these services is necessary to identify troubled students and assist them before their problems become severe and to respond adequately if a serious incident should occur. When violent events occur in the school, learning is often so disrupted that counseling must take center stage. Counseling is needed for perpetrators, victims, witnesses of violence, parents, teachers, and other school personnel and volunteers.

Psychotherapeutic interventions, beyond acute counseling, are available in the community, but the school should be involved to ensure that learning is minimally disrupted and that reentry to school is as smooth as possible. School counselors and psychologists who provide mental health triage and, when needed, refer students for more precise diagnostic services, can provide staff with information to assist in responding appropriately to various causes of violent and disruptive behaviors.

A Framework for Counseling

Social work and counseling with families of students at risk of violence helps create supports for school success that are possibly lacking, stimulates effective parenting and discipline, and provides referral to community resources that assist the family.

Counselors may become familiar with the early warning signs for violence by studying such guides as Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools. Counselors can then train teachers and other staff in recognizing these signs.

Direct delivery of initial counseling services to student victims of violence and coordination of the students' referral to and receipt of ongoing psychotherapeutic interventions minimizes the effects of violence on student victims.

Counselors and psychologists who coordinate with parents, teachers, administrators, courts, and juvenile justice officials build bridges of support and communication that address the comprehensive needs of individual students, whether perpetrators or victims.

Bringing professional counseling services to the school site after a crisis provides immediate assistance to victims and witnesses, can prevent fear from spreading to the general student body, and can limit long-term psychological damage to students and staff and their families.

Alternative Education

Most violence in schools is committed by a small group of chronic offenders who are often also involved in the juvenile justice system. These youth have a number of special needs that are not necessarily shared by all the students in the school. If their violent behavior is not of a very serious nature, they can be pulled out of regular classes briefly to receive special services or receive those services after school. If they pose a serious risk to other students, school administrators are obligated to place them in completely separate settings to ensure the safety of other youth and to provide the intensive educational and social skills training that these students need.

Normally, separating youth from their class peers is to be avoided, but the dangers that some students pose to other children require that exceptions be made. Any student who brings a gun to school must be expelled for 1 year, according to the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, with some exceptions as decided by the local chief educational administrator. Many States have passed additional legislation, and many schools have adopted policies that require suspension or expulsion of students who are disruptive or violent. These measures do protect students in school, but they do not protect the larger community or provide troubled youth with needed assistance.

Alternative schools are a promising option for addressing these concerns. Done well, alternative programs appear to foster positive development. But done poorly, they can be training grounds for violence and crime.

A Framework for Alternative Education

Students who have committed serious violent acts or carried weapons to school may pose a grave threat to other students. Separating these students from the general student body sends the message that officials have acted appropriately to preserve school safety and allows the special needs of violent or weapon-carrying students to be addressed more effectively.

Special programs for violent and weapon-carrying students are more likely to succeed if they contain the following elements: administrators with vision and commitment, extensive contact with motivated and specially trained school staff, needs-based individualized instruction, focused classes with low student-to-staff ratios, innovative presentations of materials related to real life, a caring and supportive environment, intensive counseling for students and their families, and frequent student progress reports.

Ensuring that the basic needs of these students are being met (housing, family supports, nutrition, health, financial, and others) eliminates barriers to their successful participation in the intervention program.

Intensive education, training, and practice in anger management, nonviolent communication, danger avoidance, conflict resolution, and appropriate use of mediation and legal services provide information and skills that reduce violent behavior among those at highest risk for the perpetration of violence.

Preparing students placed in separate educational programs to effectively reenter regular schools, as well as supporting them after they have made the transition, helps them avoid relapse toward violence, academic and social failure, and dropping out of school and increases their likelihood of long-term academic and interpersonal success.

Community Involvement

Schools are not just the sum of their facilities and people; they are greatly influenced by their surrounding communities. Many communities are successfully reducing school crime. Schools, parents, business leaders, law enforcement agencies, community organizations, and the students themselves can each play an important role. Successful interventions require that all these groups come together to prepare a comprehensive plan that takes into account the needs of the community and the best programs and strategies to meet those needs. Some ways that parents, police and juvenile justice authorities, business people, and community organizations can participate in prevention are suggested below.

A Framework for Community Involvement

- Parents
- Police and Juvenile Justice Authorities
- Business People
- Community Organizations

Parents

Communication is an essential component of child rearing and a constant challenge. When parents talk with their children, it shows that they care about them; gives the children an opportunity to share their concerns, interests, fears, and activities; and can give parents some ideas about aspects of their school and personal lives that can be improved. Everyday conversations also create natural opportunities for parents to teach their children social skills, anger management, problem-solving skills, and how to avoid being victims.

When establishing rules for children, parents must be clear in communicating them to children. Children also need to know that parents support the school discipline policies and any reasonable punishments that are administered by the school. Parents can help their children understand the rationale for household, school, and other rules and behavioral expectations.

Discipline involves more than punishment. Involving a child in activities that teach constructive skills such as responsibility, appropriate play behavior, self-control, and goal setting is as

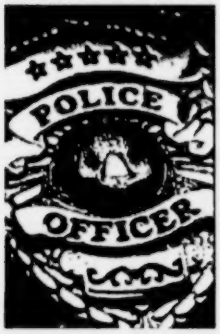
important as sanctioning them for inappropriate behavior. Parents can also devise rewards and incentives for desired behaviors as a means of preventing future rule violations and encouraging constructive behaviors.

Perhaps the best way to teach a child is by demonstration. Through their everyday actions parents teach their children how to interact socially, handle competition and defeat, discuss differences, resolve conflicts, deal with frustration in solving problems, cope with stress and anger, and many other skills.

Parents' involvement in their children's school and community life brings many benefits. Situations will arise that present opportunities for reinforcing what parents are teaching in the home. Parental presence can give some continuity in moving from one setting to the other. Being involved also gives parents an opportunity to get to know teachers, child-care providers, coaches, and others and to work with them to ensure that their children's needs are met when they are not present.

If guns or other weapons are kept in or around the house, it is critical that they be locked and completely inaccessible to unsupervised children and adolescents. Guns should be stored unloaded whenever feasible, with ammunition locked in a separate place. Firearms are not playthings, but children may view them as such unless they are taught to handle and use them responsibly or to avoid them entirely.

Raising children is difficult, and parents try to make the most of available resources. Participating in training programs in family management is a good way to get extra help. Parents can learn specific skills to reduce the stress and challenges of raising children, including problem solving, communication, coping with anger and stress, and conflict mediation. Training is may be available through the school, faith communities, or in the broader community.



Police and Juvenile Justice Authorities

Educators, police, and juvenile justice authorities can each play an integral part in preventing school violence. Educators are equipped to teach students. Police can intervene in a crisis situation involving a violent or potentially violent student and can help decrease truancy. Juvenile justice authorities can assign probation officers and social service workers to schools where they can better monitor and serve adjudicated students, design specific regimens for youthful offenders to influence their behavior, and provide stronger and broader sanctions for violent behavior.

The presence of police in or near the school and in neighborhoods can deter violence and prevent situations from escalating. Police can remove trouble spots that interfere with students traveling to and from school, prevent strangers from entering schools, reduce the ability of students to smuggle weapons into schools, deter gang activities, identify students who are selling drugs or under the influence of drugs, and conduct random searches for weapons and controlled substances. In these and other circumstances they add their broader authority to the supervision of students.

When police routinely patrol the school grounds, they are in a better position to respond quickly to a request for help from school authorities. The role of police could be to separate a violent student from a potential victim, talk a student into giving up a threatening stance, subdue and transport a student from the scene, contact emergency services, assist in traffic control as

emergency services arrive or as parents pick up their children during or after a crisis, collect evidence, or participate in other activities. Rapid response is critical in a situation where many children are in harm's way.

Police and juvenile justice authorities can build relationships with youth outside the police station, courtroom, or other correctional settings. They can develop good relationships with students as a means of preventing a confrontation in the future. As the relationships build, students will perhaps see them as positive role models, assist them in their work, and gain a greater understanding about the difficulties they face in their work. Instilling a broader respect for authority is essential in preventing crime. Opportunities for building constructive relationships between authorities and youth include bicycle registration drives, school carnivals, fund-raisers, community policing partnerships, and sponsored recreational activities.

Business People

Although often overlooked in school-based efforts to prevent violence, businesses can be a valuable resource. They can offer financial support for programs and services, facilities for events, safe havens for students traveling to and from school, training programs for job skills, leadership and organizational skills, and jobs and internships for students. They can have a presence in the schools by donating computers or services, directly offering programs, or participating in meetings.

Business leaders can get involved in reducing school crime by providing flexible scheduling and encouraging their staff to volunteer in the schools. Schools often need responsible adults to serve as mentors, tutors, coaches, field trip supervisors, and in other capacities.

Employees with children often find themselves in difficult positions when they are required to be at work yet need to be with their children. Business leaders can resolve these problems by providing parenting services, such as family management classes or counseling, to employees and by offering flexible scheduling for employees to attend school events, parent-teacher conferences, and school-related crises.

In order for school crime and violence to be prevented, violence in communities must also be prevented. Business leaders can do their part by offering courses in anger management, stress management, conflict resolution, and other social skills to their employees. In addition, business leaders can create a workplace culture that supports positive interactions by treating employees with dignity and respect.

Community Organizations

As the primary community organization, the local government can provide leadership in school violence prevention through town meetings, community events, and support for research. All schools should be encouraged to monitor and report school crime, and school administrators, law enforcement agencies, social service personnel, and juvenile justice authorities should be encouraged to collaborate and share data.

Health, social service, and faith-based organizations have a great deal to contribute to preventing youth violence. They can partner with schools to ensure that students' basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, and health care are met. Youth who are hungry, without adequate housing, or sick yet unable to see a doctor are not likely to be engaged in the learning process. A good partnership enables schools and agencies to meet most students' needs in the school without the

difficulties of referrals and the risk of inadequate followup. In addition, agencies can distribute information on their full range of services to families through the schools.

Health, social service, and faith organization staff are often in the position of recognizing the signs and investigating accusations of child abuse. A great deal of child abuse could be identified and prevented if these groups shared their expertise with school staff. Similarly, staff of community organizations can become experts in recognizing the warning signs for youth violence and could offer training to school staff. School staff could enhance the organization staff's understanding of the warning signs by sharing their knowledge of how these warning signs are manifested in the schools. School and organization officials could explore options for staff to meet their professional development needs and requirements through this type of information-sharing conference.

Selecting Effective Models for Intervention

Evidence for the effectiveness of violence prevention strategies in schools is preliminary but growing steadily. As progress is made, schools and communities are increasingly able to move away from strategies that are based on intuition toward those based on science. Strategies can be adapted to meet the needs of any local area through a process that includes needs assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, and revision. This process maximizes the success of the intervention and ensures that it fits well within the school's comprehensive violence prevention efforts.

The Process of Selection

A. Unite Schools & Communities
B. Identify & Measure the Problem
C. Set Goals & Objectives
D. Identify Appropriate Strategies
E. Implement a Comprehensive Plan
F. Measure the Success of the Effort
G. Revise Strategies Based on the Evaluation

Unite Schools & Communities

Schools function within the broader community and need participation from families, faith communities, businesses, social service agencies, police, juvenile justice authorities, civic organizations, and others throughout the prevention and intervention processes. Members of the community may share with the school specific information about youth crime, systems for measuring levels of violence, interpersonal skills for working with youth, and others. They perhaps also have access to funding, volunteers, learning opportunities, programs, learning materials, and a wealth of other resources.

Harnessing these resources and making the partnership successful in reducing school violence requires strong leadership from school officials. School and community partnerships invite multiple perspectives and allow the sharing of responsibility and accomplishments. Partners' goals are perhaps more readily achieved when specific, manageable tasks are assigned to small

groups of dedicated individuals.

Identify & Measure the Problem

School administrators, school staff, students, parents, and community organizations possibly all have different perceptions of school crime. Wide variation in viewpoints can hinder agreement on how to proceed. Perceptions tend to converge once objective data are available and shared widely. Collecting data on victimization, perpetration, substance abuse, and other problems can help develop consensus on local school violence problems, identify points of intervention, and assist in gaining resources to deal with the problems.

School officials may seek readily available data from several sources. As the effort gains momentum, a more systematic means can be established to track multiple infractions by individual students, identify problem areas, and examine trends over time. Anonymous surveys can be administered to students to assess incidents that are less often reported or detected and to measure attitudes and beliefs about crime. Perceptions of school violence and safety can also be assessed through focus groups and interviews with students and staff.

Set Goals & Objectives

Goals describe broad purposes and common directions, while objectives are the sequential, measurable steps necessary to achieve each goal. Research data identify the most important and changeable problems, providing a basis for goals and objectives. Intervention goals that are realistic and attainable lead to greater commitment and long-term success. Initial goals and objectives should be modest until the level of experience and training is sufficient to press further. Setting unrealistic expectations, such as eliminating school crime, and not reaching them discourages participants and invites criticism. Generally, goals are more useful when they are reasonably specific and can be supported by a fairly short list of objectives.

Objectives describe "who will do how much of what by when." Often the objectives are written in sequential order, but multiple objectives are generally addressed in overlapping periods of time. Measurable objectives convey the advantage of knowing when, or whether, they have been achieved. When objectives are not measurable, they invite uncertainty and allow partial accomplishment. They do not need to be so specific that every minor action is included. Stating the primary objectives is sufficient to allow accountability and to monitor progress. Goals and objectives can be altered in the course of an intervention as experience and wisdom are gained. They should be communicated to all participants throughout the intervention, and restated whenever changes are made.

Identify Appropriate Strategies

Although some strategies are more effective than others, no single program or strategy will be effective in meeting the needs of all students. The best approach is often a mix of strategies selected based on local goals, objectives, needs, and resources. A comprehensive plan could offer some strategies to the entire student body, while directing others toward the more violent students. Tracking students from year to year, offering "booster" sessions at appropriate intervals, and using relapse prevention techniques might enhance success.

When selecting strategies, several features are important, including evidence that the strategy has been effective in the past, the match between the strategy and the objectives, the reading level of educational materials, and the appropriateness of cultural images and examples. Several of these models can be implemented either simultaneously or sequentially. In some settings, a particular combination of parts of several models could be more effective than using all aspects of several models with high fidelity. Those who choose to do this should realize that the combination they are implementing is a new and untested approach and should carefully assess the plan's effectiveness. Environmental and administrative strategies can be effectively balanced with educational and skills-training strategies.

Implement a Comprehensive Plan

Successful implementation occurs in several stages that vary somewhat from one community to another. In the early stages, program administrators will obtain district approvals, seek community support through a public campaign, train staff, select students for participation, request approval from parents, and establish procedures for monitoring the implementation. District officials perhaps have to approve the program as well as evaluation instruments. A broad campaign in the community could be appropriate for some interventions, raising awareness of the school violence problem, introducing the intervention, explaining the process, and inviting expertise, volunteers, and donations. The purpose of staff development is to enhance the consistency and quality of program delivery and to build enthusiasm for the program. In some interventions, student selection can be based on such criteria as risk factors or needs. Parents may need to give consent for their children to participate. These elements are usually in place before students become involved in the intervention.

The later stages include appraisals of fidelity to the plan; the match between budgeted and actual costs; the initial response of students, staff, and parents; unforeseen barriers; unintended negative consequences of selected strategies; changes in the nature of the problem over time; and the need for adjustments. Fidelity involves consistency between the plan and the actual events. Careful replication of selected strategies improves success and should be monitored. Cost overruns are common and should be anticipated in new interventions. Responses from participants may be varied (such as changes in behaviors, attitudes, fears, and stressors), and not all positive (particularly at first), even in the best of interventions. Implementers should expect problems (barriers, consequences, changes, need for adjustments, and the like), view them as opportunities for collaborative resolution, and address them fully. The time and attention given to each phase of implementation, the amount of training provided to staff, the consistency of support and delivery, and the attention to individual needs and progress are just a few of the quality issues to be considered.

Measure the Success of the Effort

Evaluation is necessary to determine if the effort is effective and to identify ways to make it better. Ideally, an evaluation should use professionally prepared and tested instruments. When new evaluation tools or methods are devised, they should be tested on a small group prior to the implementation to see if they will produce useful information. Evaluators commonly collect data from surveys, interviews, incident records, disciplinary referrals, and other sources immediately before and after an intervention to assess whether or not the strategy is having the desired effects

on student attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. If improvements are greater in the intervention group than in a comparison group (one that did not receive the intervention, received it to a lesser extent, or received something different), the intervention is considered a success. In some cases research specialists can be recruited from universities, colleges, or the community to help with the evaluation.

Revise Strategies Based on the Evaluation

After the evaluation has been completed, prevention program administrators make revisions to improve the comprehensive plan, implementation, student and staff selection and training, materials, methods of communication and collaboration, and other program aspects. If a school has been administering a plan for several years with little impact on violence, the intervention or prevention plan can be replaced with an entirely new strategy or group of strategies. Recommendations for improvement can be garnered through interviews, surveys, or focus groups. These assessments can reveal which activities were most effective, which materials work best, what barriers were encountered and how can they be overcome, and what type of students received the most or least benefit and why.

Conclusion

Achieving school safety requires meeting several challenges simultaneously. Uniting concerned adults and youth through a community partnership is an effective means of raising children and teenagers to be happy, responsible citizens. The selection of appropriate programs and strategies to improve school safety can be facilitated by beginning with a thorough assessment of previous violent incidents, ongoing violence prevention initiatives, and the perceptions of students, parents, and staff. The assessment could also be useful in tailoring selected interventions as the comprehensive plan is developed and refined by a team of administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, security and police officers, students, and others in an ongoing process of discussion and evaluation. Although this process is sometimes difficult, carefully designed, comprehensive intervention plans are our best hope for enhancing school safety.

For more information:

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